

2022 CUNY Ethics and Morality Essay Contest Submission

Ren at the Core of Caring in Nursing and Education

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In a world of illness, poverty, violence, and division, we must take it upon ourselves to spread peace and love to society. Virtues are to stand as the moral compass in one's life, constantly in mind as we navigate through interactions with others. While these virtues have lost importance over the years, they hold immense value in terms of ethics and integrity. As humans, we have the capacity and responsibility to respect one another. Confucius proposed Five Constant Virtues: Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, and Xin. In particular, the concept of *Ren* seems to resonate in the work that I do and the actions I take in my daily life. Ren means goodness, benevolence, and love. Each human being has the capacity to possess these traits, and Ren manifests itself when a virtuous person treats others with humaneness (Stefon). Whether in the education system or in the healthcare field, I feel that Ren is integral in providing compassionate care to others.

One of my first jobs was at an early intervention program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here, we were assigned one-on-one to a child who we were to model, shape, and teach certain behaviors. We used applied behavior analysis, or ABA, which emphasized a system solely of positive reinforcement. In this learning technique, there were no punishments or negative reinforcement. The kids were met with only love and positivity to increase desired behaviors and decrease unwanted behaviors. Before taking this job, I was warned several times that a lot of patience was needed for this role. While working, I saw that it was easy to become frustrated if your child cried throughout the whole session or could not complete the tasks. Despite the rough days, I realized that these children needed a warm heart to care for them. At just two or three years of age, these kids were not deliberately meaning to irritate anyone. It was likely that they were just as confused as we were with their own emotional lability. They needed to be taught and guided, not with punishment or scolding, but with compassion and understanding. I made it of utmost importance that I treated my children with benevolence and

empathy because I knew this would propel them in their learning. It wasn't enough to just lead them through the tasks; they deserved to be nourished and nurtured with kindness.

I truly enjoyed working at this early intervention center and thought of how I could use ABA modalities in other aspects of my life. At the afterschool program I now work at, I noticed that a lot of the students were rowdy, disrespectful, and badly behaved. I wondered how they would respond to positive reinforcement, so I suggested an idea of rewarding the kids with stickers. Soon after, the program director introduced a sticker system in which the students would receive stickers for good behaviors. Once they reached ten stickers, they could cash in their stickers for a prize. So far, I've seen a substantial improvement in the children's behavior. A child doing good deeds or behaving properly would receive something good in return, and this would fuel a cycle of goodness. Of course, Ren does not just mean positive reinforcement. It means going above and beyond to exude benevolence towards others. This private or intrinsically motivated goodness is necessary to achieve public goodness. From Confucius' perspective, all humans have the potential of realizing Ren. This potential must be cultivated through practice and learning (Sun 79). As a teacher, it is my responsibility to develop a high sense of morality in the kids, as well as in myself. No matter how badly the students behave, I always like to remember that their behavior does not and should not affect how I act towards them. If I approach the students in an abrasive manner, how can I expect them to develop good behavior? I am in control of my own actions, and I can meet the students with discipline in a kind way. Although this can be hard and overwhelming, I overcome these struggles by remembering it is a learning process. I make an effort to highlight the productive actions the students are taking and engage in this culture of positivity with the kids.

These experiences in the education system have carried with me into my future career of nursing. This past summer, I participated in a full-time nursing internship where I was able to take what I had learned in class and critically apply it in real life. I was submerged into the world of nursing and fell in love with working at the bedside, especially from being able to advance my skills and facilitate patient interactions. At the beginning of this program, I remember a nurse told me that it is an honor for us to care for someone when they are most vulnerable. I had not really understood what he meant at the time, but as I gained more experience in the field, I came to appreciate his message.

I remember having a patient whose legs were tremendously swollen. She had uncontrolled heart failure and had to stay for weeks at the hospital. Over the course of caring for her, I recall her to at first be very grateful and compliant with our care. However, I saw her become more confused and agitated as her time in the hospital increased. One moment she would tearfully thank us for caring for her, and the next moment she would berate the healthcare team and refuse to comply with treatment. While it was easy for staff members to become aggravated by her attitude, she was still our patient and in need of care. I imagined myself in her position. She must have felt anxious, lonely, and hopeless regarding her condition. I then imagined that she was my family member. Would I ever accept a healthcare professional to treat my relatives with indifference and coldness? Such an important aspect of Ren is putting yourself in another's shoes. In other words, do unto others what you would do to yourself. Treat others how you would like to be treated. Many of these patients are dealing with disheartening and debilitating diagnoses. With their illness feeling new, scary, and overwhelming to them, it is important for us to provide truly empathetic care to these patients. To develop trust with these patients is incredibly valuable and integral as a nurse.

The concept of Ren is deeply embedded into the art of nursing. Ren is at the core of caring in nursing and it is our mission to provide love and compassion to our patients. As the most trusted profession in the world, nurses are seen as and honored with the title of the ultimate caregivers. We are trusted with patients in the most vulnerable and important times in their lives, whether from birth, while sick, or during death. I find Ren especially relevant in my role as a nurse, considering the patient-centered care we partake in. In Chinese, Ren translates to “people”. I think this is a beautiful connection to nursing care. The “Ren-Ren” signifies the relationship and care arising between the nurse and other nurses, their client, and society. This is reflected in an ongoing dynamic process through human interaction and mutual support (Lok). Inherently, this brings forth the founding tenets of nursing: benevolence and empathy.

Although teaching, nursing, or just daily life can be exhausting, a little goes a long way in terms of spreading love. It is important now more than ever to practice following virtues, especially Ren. By acting with altruism and humanity, one can achieve a higher state of morality and foster positivity around themselves. I chose this virtue because it truly makes me feel like I am making a difference in the world. I find it satisfying and rewarding when I can impact the lives of others, whether it is by teaching students or treating patients. Consistently following a virtue in life is not an easy task, but it is this difficulty that makes it so much more meaningful. How easy would it be for us to give up and stop striving to become a better person? How simple would life be if we could lean into our indulgences? Sure, that may be the easy way out, but it does not challenge us nor motivate us to achieve more in life. I am grateful that I have the opportunity to practice Ren in the profession that I love.

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